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# TRACT NO. XCI

THE ARTICLES OF RELIGION FROM AN  
AMERICAN POINT OF VIEW

BY

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## TRACT NO. XCI

DURING the sixty and six years that have elapsed since 1841, the meteorite known in ecclesiastical history as Tract No. XC. has had ample time to cool. Such was the heat of friction developed by the stone's passage through the Anglican atmosphere, so violent was the explosion caused by its impact upon the hard surface of an evangelical England, that, for the time being, a fair appraisal of values was impossible. Any attempt to lift and weigh the incandescent mass would have been futile. But patience has now had her perfect work, relative temperatures have quietly adjusted themselves, and it is open to sober-minded critics to subject Tract XC. to libration and analysis; hence Tract No. XCI., or *The Same Subject Continued*.

Cardinal Newman has left on record in the *Apologia* a very full and frank statement of his reasons for making the Articles of Religion the subject of a Tract.

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He had been gradually leading his disciples on, through a sort of enchanted forest, beautiful for leafage and undergrowth, though singularly deficient in guide-posts, until some of them, as he could not fail to discern, were on the point of asking him awkward questions. On the lips of more than one of the devotees there trembled the anxious interrogatory, "Master, whither?"

"From the time that I had entered upon the duties of Public Tutor of my College," Newman writes, "when my doctrinal views were very different from what they were in 1841, I had meditated a comment upon the Articles. Then, when the Movement was in its swing, friends had said to me, 'What will you make of the Articles?' but I did not share the apprehension which their question implied. . . . I had been enjoined, I think by my Bishop, to keep these men straight, and I wished so to do, but their tangible difficulty was subscription to the Articles, and thus the question of the Articles came before me. It was thrown in our teeth,— 'How can you manage to sign the Articles? they are directed against Rome.' 'Against Rome?' I made answer. 'What do you mean by Rome?' and I proceeded to make distinctions of which I shall now give an account."

There follow some eight pages of explanation, of a highly interesting character. With Newman's dialectic method in handling the question of subscription, those

who have read Tract XC. are familiar. His main thesis is that the Articles do not oppose Catholic teaching, that they only slightly oppose Roman dogma, and that, in so far as they antagonise Rome at all, it is mainly with a view to disowning certain superstitions which are not necessarily a part of the system with which, in the Protestant mind, they are commonly associated. In other words, Newman held that the protest of the English Reformers had been directed not so much against the barque of Peter as against a lot of barnacles encrusted upon the submerged portion of her hull.

This theory of the true bearing of the Articles was not wholly new; what made it startling in 1841 was the fact of its having received, for the first time, the *imprimatur* of an Anglican divine. As far back as in 1633, one Abraham Davenport, a Franciscan Father, known in religion as Sancta Clara, had suggested that at least some of the English Articles might be dealt with in the fashion which Newman, more than two hundred years later, recommended. Eighteen of the famous Thirty-

nine Davenport declared to be thoroughly orthodox from the Roman point of view, two he regarded as mere logomachies, while, as to the remaining nineteen, he held that, even if they were not "ambitious of a Catholic interpretation," they were, to use the phrase of the keen analyst who was to come after, "patient" of such a reading. But Sancta Clara, as has been noted, was a Franciscan; he looked at the question from the other side of the stream from that on which the English theologians were supposed to stand; his advances met with no very cordial reception, and the Articles continued to be regarded by successive generations of educated clergy and faithful laity as the nation's protest against Rome. Sancta Clara and his devices had long been lost out of mind when Newman launched the torpedo destined to blow the Thirty-nine Articles, in their supposed character of a reasoned Protestant eirenic, to shivers.

For really that is what has happened, though the metaphor may seem to some a little violent. A system which has failed to serve the purpose it was originally con-

trived to answer, may fairly enough be said to have been shivered by the agent which has demonstrated the failure.

And what was the purpose for which the Thirty-nine Articles were originally set forth? The official documents of the sixteenth century supply us with a perfectly clear answer to the question. They were published as having been agreed upon "by the Archbishops and Bishops of both Provinces and the whole clergy, in the Convocation holden at London in the year of Our Lord 1542, for the avoiding of the diversities of opinions and for the establishing of consent touching true religion." Have the Articles, as a matter of fact, accomplished these salutary ends? Has there been any real avoidance of "diversities of opinions"? Has there been any genuine establishing of consent? Not certainly since 1841, whatever may have been the case in earlier years. One may, to be sure, buy at the theological book shops either Forbes on the Thirty-nine Articles, or Browne; but if he attempts to make the Bishop of Brechin keep step with the Bishop of Winchester, he will meet

with only indifferent success. Can two walk together except they be agreed? The prophet Amos thought not.

I repeat, then, that in so far as the accomplishment of their avowed purpose is concerned, the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England have been and are an open failure. They attempted the establishing of a common standard of religious belief with respect to a multitude of details, and it simply could not be done,—could not be done to last. English Christianity owes a debt of gratitude to John Henry Newman for having made this point clear. His logic metamorphosed what had been, for so many years, hypocritically denominated “Articles of peace,” into unmistakable articles of war. Ever since his day the cry has been concerning them, “Not peace, but a sword.” “How many sacraments hath Christ ordained in his Church?” “Two,” answers the ingenuous child, fresh from his Catechism. “Oh, no;” interrupts the Anglo-Catholic, backed, as he now contends, by Article twenty-five; “Oh, no; seven, my good child; only you must be careful not to call them sacraments of

the Gospel." This is a fair sample of what Tract XC. did for the better explication of those fourteen Articles which constitute what may be called the disputed possessions, as contrasted with the common territory of English and Latin Christianity.

We pass from the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England to the Thirty-eight of the American Episcopal Church, since it is with these latter that the present paper undertakes more particularly to deal. Three questions with respect to the American Articles force themselves upon us:—What is their legal *status*? What, under twentieth century conditions, is their theological value? Why should they continue any longer to be bound up with the Book of Common Prayer? Let us begin with the question of *status*.

So long as the Colonial Church continued under the nominal oversight of the Bishop of London, the Articles, as a matter of course, had for American Churchmen precisely the same binding obligation that they had for English Churchmen, no more no less.

Since no candidate for Holy Orders

could be ordained in those days save by a Bishop of the home Church, whom he must needs cross the ocean to find, every Church of England clergyman exercising his office on this side of the Atlantic must, at some time or other, have actually put his name to the Articles.

During the period, however, that intervened between the overthrow of the British sovereignty on this soil and the firm establishment of an autonomous Church in what the Preface to the Prayer Book calls "these American States," the Articles were, to all intents and purposes, *in nubibus*. Nobody seems to have known precisely where they stood, or what was the exact measure of their binding force. It was evident that to throw them overboard altogether, especially after the bold step taken in the practical repudiation of the *Quicunque vult*, would be a somewhat violent break of doctrinal continuity with the Church of England, while, at the same time, formally to adopt them without some measure of revision was impossible. The twenty-first of the Thirty-nine, for example, literally reeked with the flavour of



monarchy, asserting, as it did, that General Councils might "not be gathered together without the commandment and will of Princes." To have sounded that note in the ears of "these American States," in the first flush of their democratic pride, might have subjected White to insult, and Seabury to banishment. In the Book of Articles appended to the American Prayer Book, nothing follows the title "Article XXI. Of the Authority of General Councils" save an asterisk; and if the asterisk be pursued to the bottom of the page, we find the following naive footnote:—"The Twenty-first of the former Articles is omitted; because it is partly of a local and civil nature" (as if there were anything really "local" or "civil" about a General Council), "and is provided for, as to the remaining parts of it, in other Articles." A happy phrase this—"provided for in other Articles"; it shall be given a broader application presently. The upshot of the debate over the recognition or non-recognition of the Articles was their "establishment," with a few modifications (the most important of which

is the one just noted), by the General Convention of 1801.

It is worth while, before we pass this point, to quote Bishop White. He remarks, in his *Memoirs* (p. 33), that "the object kept in view in all the consultations held and deliberations formed was the perpetuating of the Episcopal Church on the ground of the general principles which she had inherited from the Church of England; and of not departing from them, except so far as either local circumstances required or some very important cause rendered proper. To those acquainted with the history of the Church of England it must be evident that the object here stated was accomplished on the ratification of the Articles." Tiffany, in his *History*, commenting upon this memorandum, suggestively adds that an attempt, three years later, that is to say, in the General Convention of 1804, to make subscription to the Articles compulsory upon the Clergy, by canonical enactment, failed.

The just conclusion from these historical data would seem to be that, since 1801, the Thirty-eight Articles of Religion have,

in some sense, been of binding force upon the consciences of our clergy, though in precisely what sense or to what extent it is not easy to say. Few would venture to assert that they stand on the same footing with the Catholic Creeds in respect to essential dogma; while, on the other hand, few would go so far as to declare them, in round terms, non-obligatory. They would appear to be held, to use a most illusory phrase, forced upon us by the exigencies of these difficult times, "for substance of doctrine," though where the "substance" ends and the "accidents" begin, who shall determine?

And just here would seem to be the proper point for a distinct intimation of the present writer's motive and purpose in opening this subject. We are all of us more or less disquieted by the evident disinclination of the flower of our youth to seek the ministry of religion as their calling in life. Whether or not the same tendency is observable in communions other than our own is a separate question. But, without going further afield than our own immediate ecclesiastical limits permit,

why is it, we may well ask, that with such magnificent sources of supply as our great Schools, Concord, Groton, Southborough, Pomfret, Cheshire, Newport, (not to mention others) afford, the current setting towards Holy Orders should be so sluggish and intermittent? After all due allowance has been made for the fact that many of these boys have been brought up at home in such luxurious surroundings that it is not in them to face possible hardship, it still remains a difficult question, Why do they not in larger numbers flock to the Colours? It is the writer's conviction that in many instances—by no means in all, but in many—the reason is that no clear-cut, frank, direct answer is to be had to the question, To what do I commit myself doctrinally if I enter the ministry of the Church?

The Lambeth Platform, to be sure, has an answer to this question, as clear as a bell. "The Nicene Creed," it declares, is "the sufficient statement of the Christian Faith."

"But what about the Articles of Religion?" urges the level-headed, keen-

eyed young college graduate, on the edge of postulancy, though doubtful about candidateship,—“To what extent am I bound by them? They contain, I find, many hundreds of propositions. Must I feel in my heart that I give honest assent to every one of these when I am asked in Ordination whether I will minister the doctrine of Christ, not only ‘as the Lord hath commanded,’ which would be a comparatively simple obligation, but ‘as this Church hath received the same’? Tell me, O Bishop, Guardian of the fold and Shepherd of the flock, tell me, am I bound by an equally strong tie to the affirmation that ‘works before justification’ have the nature of sin, and to the affirmation ‘on the third day He rose again from the dead’?” To which the Bishop, as things now are, can but reply, “You have Burnet and Beveridge, Browne, Forbes and Hardwicke; hear them.”

The Articles of Religion, when analysed and classified, fall into seven groups—the theological, strictly so called, the embryological, the anthropological, the soteriological, the ecclesiological, the biblio-

logical, and the sociological. The sections, moreover, follow in the order named. Under the head of 'Theology, pure and simple, come the first five, with these titles, "Of Faith in the Holy Trinity," "Of the Word or Son of God which was made Very Man," "Of the going down of Christ into Hell," "Of the Resurrection of Christ," "Of the Holy Ghost."

Under the head of embryology—a word which may be used, for lack of a better, to define the study of sources—are to be classed Articles six, seven, and eight, which deal with the germ-plots of Christian doctrine, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and the Catholic Creed in its two forms—the so-called Apostolic and the Nicene. Under the head of Anthropology come Articles nine and ten, dealing respectively with Birth-sin and Free-will. Soteriology fills no fewer than eight Articles, namely, the eleventh, Of the Justification of Man; the twelfth, Of Good Works; the thirteenth, Of Works before Justification; the fourteenth, Of Works of Supererogation; the fifteenth, Of Christ alone Without Sin;

the sixteenth, Of Sin after Baptism; the seventeenth, Of Predestination and Election; and the eighteenth, Of obtaining Eternal Salvation only by the Name of Christ. All these in answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?"—an inquiry originally replied to, it will be remembered, at a place called Philippi, in fewer words.

Ecclesiology, not in its petty sense of the science of priestly vestments and chancel furniture, but in its dignified and lofty sense of the science of the Church's corporate life, is dealt with in fifteen Articles, to wit, Nos. nineteen to thirty-four, No. twenty-one of "the former Articles" counting zero. In these ecclesiological Articles we have the Church's constituency defined, its authority, as limited by Holy Scripture, declared, its existence in a purgatorial state questioned, its ministry safeguarded, the language of its worship confined to the vernacular, its sacraments numbered, explained, and protected against both misinterpretation and misuse, the marriage of its priests justified, its sentences of excommunication made valid,

and its traditions and ceremonies given such subordinate rank as rightfully attaches to them. The bibliographical Articles are two in number, and deal with the Books of Homilies and the Book of Consecration of Bishops and Ordering of Priests and Deacons.

Finally, under the head Sociological may be classed the last three Articles, one of which touches upon the power of the civil magistrates, one upon communism, and one upon the lawfulness of making oath in courts of justice.

The Thirty-eight Articles having been thus summarised, it is timely to call attention to the fact that the American Episcopal Church has in its custody three-and-twenty more, namely, the Twelve Articles of the Catholic Creed, and the Eleven Articles of her Constitution or Organic Law. The thesis which this Tract No. XCI. has been written to set forth and to maintain is, that the twenty-three amply suffice for our purpose without the thirty-eight. Suppose we try the several groups just enumerated by this test.

As for the Trinitarian theology, with



which the Book of Articles opens, it is evidently identical, in fact almost verbally identical, with the teachings of the Nicene Creed. So much, therefore, may be set down as surplusage.

The open Bible on our lecterns testifies to our respect for the authority of the Book, if it be a "Standard" Bible, and its table of contents will be a sufficient definition of what is held to be canonical Scripture.

Similarly, it may be said of the two Creeds that their very presence in our manual of worship is ample enough proof of our thinking that they "ought thoroughly to be received and believed." This disposes of the trilogy of Articles concerned with the source of authority in religion.

On Anthropology, the next subject treated, it is enough to know that man is undoubtedly a sinner; while, of Soteriology, it is enough to know that Christ is incontestably a Saviour. Upon both of these cardinal points the Creed insists, when of the Only-begotten of the Father it affirms that "for us men and for our

salvation" He came down from heaven. Were we not lost, saying we should not need; were He not Saviour, his coming down had been in vain.

In a Church which, like our own, has committed its organic law to writing, the proper place for ecclesiological teaching is the Constitution; and if the eleven Articles of that document, as we now have it, do not suffice, it would be quite within the power of our ecclesiastical legislature to add a twelfth.

Passing to bibliography, it is certainly unnecessary to have a special Article of Religion to declare that our Ordinal has nothing in it that, "of itself, is superstitious and ungodly." The fact that we continue it in use ought to be sufficient evidence that we resent such imputation; while, as for the Homilies, since the very Article which commends them also suspends them,—postpones, that is to say, the public reading of them in churches until they shall have been revised,—we need not trouble ourselves about them. It is more than a century since this good resolution was put into print; and though

there have been revisions many, we still wait for the homiletical one.

There remain to be disposed of the three Articles designated as sociological. Of these, the first, "Of the Power of the Civil Magistrates," is a very different thing under its American form from what we find in the corresponding place in the English Book—in fact, may not unfairly be said to teach an opposite doctrine; for whereas the English Article affirms that godly Princes "should rule all estates and degrees committed to their charge by God, whether they be ecclesiastical or temporal," the American Article quietly observes that "the Power of the Civil Magistrate hath no authority in things purely spiritual"—not a flat contradiction, perhaps, but dangerously near to it.

The second of the Sociological Articles antagonises Communism as taught by "certain Anabaptists." But anarchists, not anabaptists, are the men with whom we have to do; and, moreover, if we are to have an Article of Religion to confront each and every one of the economic heresies that disturb our peace, we shall need,

not thirty-nine, but a hundred. The Book concludes with the Article entitled "Of a Christian Man's Oath." It confesses that vain and rash swearing is forbidden Christian men, but insists that in a good cause a Christian man may swear if the magistrate requireth it. This is acceptable enough doctrine to all who do not take the Sermon on the Mount too literally; but, in view of the fact that in the courts of most English-speaking countries, and even in the House of Commons, since Bradlaugh, an affirmation is accepted in place of an oath, the Article has that belated look which befits its position at the end of the column.

This Tract has been written in no acrimonious or destructive spirit. The writer has no wish to contravene a single statement in the Articles of Religion. He candidly acknowledges that Christian men may swear, and he is utterly unwilling that other Christian men should esteem his goods and riches common, touching his own "right, title, and possession of the same." A like cheerful assent he gives to all the propositions of the formulary, as he

understands them ; for it would be strange indeed if, among the multitude of interpretations now allowed, he should fail of finding the special one suited to the idiosyncrasies of his particular mind. But while this is his present attitude, he recalls the day when it was not. He recalls the day when, to his youthful and untutored vision, the Articles seemed to obscure rather than to elucidate the answer to the question, What is the doctrine of the Episcopal Church? He cannot help being of the opinion that to-day young men in great numbers are similarly embarrassed. They can believe the Creeds, but what are they to make of this lengthy *addendum* to the Creeds?

It may be urged that some *addendum* is necessary, seeing that the Creeds do not interpret themselves. There is truth in this objection, but has the bringer of it considered what an immense amount of interpretative power is stored up in the historic liturgy of the Church? The Creed, for example, is very concise, very concise indeed, in the region of anthropology and soteriology; but the Prayers

of the Ages, in a singularly full and satisfactory way, show us how Christians have always thought, or, what is, perhaps, still more to the point, *felt* upon these subjects.

What need of Article twelve, "Of Good Works," when we have learned, on the Second Sunday before Lent, to say, "O Lord God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do," and on the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity are again to pray, "Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that thy people do unto Thee true and laudable service"? It is safe to say that there is not a single Article of the Creed that does not find similar expansion and elucidation somewhere between the covers of the Prayer Book before you reach the Psalter, and long before you reach the Articles.

It is just here that Anglicans enjoy a great advantage over Presbyterians. Today the Westminster Confession totters to its fall. The Brief Statement will not save it, for the Brief Statement was only allowed to come into existence upon an understanding that for "substance of doctrine" it was to be regarded as a fair

exponent of the longer document. Relief obtained on such terms can be but temporary. Only the gnats have been strained out, the camel is left in the cup. But if the Westminster Confession goes to pieces, what have our Presbyterian brethren to fall back upon? They have never conceded to the Catholic Creeds that high place of honour in which Anglicans have always held them. If Westminster fails them, they have no Nicæa to fall back upon. It looks as if it would be a case, as in Paul's shipwreck, of "some on boards and some on broken pieces of the ship." In such an event, may a good Providence so order things that, as happened on the coast of Malta, they shall escape all safe to land,—the land of the historic faith, no island but the continent of truth. Yes, the Creeds suffice. They have outlived many a document like our Book of Articles and the Confessions of Augsburg and of Westminster, and will outlive many another. The Confessions have their day and cease to be; the Creeds live on—all the days are theirs. The Creeds are like Stonehenge and the Pyramids;—to go at

them with hammer and chisel, under a pretext of reparation, were little short of sacrilege. The Thirty-nine Articles are a sixteenth century Episcopal residence of many rooms, some of them much out of repair.

But what shall we do with our Book of Articles if we snip the threads which now bind it up with the Book of Common Prayer? Put it, with reverent and loving hands, in the Archives, I reply — the Archives of English Religion. There are other books to keep it company in that honoured and dignified retirement. There is *The Institution of a Christian Man*; there is *King Henry's Primer*; there is *Nowell's Catechism*; there is *Jewel's Apology*; there are those unfortunate Books of Homilies, still unrevised; and there is, if you please, *The Confession of our Christian Faith*, commonly called the *Creed of St. Athanasius*.

What a handsome set of Archives they would make, and how happily the Thirty-nine Articles would fit in! *Bibliotheca Anglicana* we will call it, and it shall have glass doors to protect the honoured pages from an otherwise inevitable dust.



















































































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